

MUKTAD

(By Er. Dr. Ramiyar Parvez Karanjia)

Zoroastrians all over the world celebrate the last ten days of their religious calendar year, that is, from roj Ashtad mah Spandarmad to the Vahishtoisht Gatha, as the Muktdad. The word Muktdad is also referred to as Muktdāt, which is closer to the Sanskrit word from which it is derived – *mukt ātmān*. It is the Sanskrit rendering of the Avestan word *ashāunām*.

Muktdad is a joyous occasion for remembering and welcoming the Fravashis. We need to show our love and gratitude to them, as they help us in many ways. We have to thank both the types of Fravashis - those helping Nature and those helping souls of men (living as well as departed ones). In old books, among the list of duties of a Zoroastrian, the duty of celebrating the Muktdad is foremost.

According to *Saddar Bundahishn* during these days the souls of the departed too come down to the earth. The Fravashis, who are the guardians of the soul, accompany them. All souls are liberated, from wherever they are, even from hell. The souls of the pious make merry as if a traveler has returned home. The souls of the evil do not experience much joy as they are in the dread of returning back.

Zoroastrians erroneously believe that Muktdad are the days of remembering just their departed ones. In fact, Muktdad are the days for the collective worship of all Fravashis, followed by the individual remembrance of souls and Fravashis of one's dear departed ones.

During the days of Muktdad, the Fravashis come collectively to this world and go to their respective houses. Whenever the Muktdad are properly celebrated and the Fravashis are duly propitiated, the affairs of those people are successful, and there is all round prosperity. People are blessed with health, strength, happiness, protection and abundance of waters. The Fravashis even bless the city and nation in which they are remembered.

Preparation for Muktdad:

In the past, especially when Muktdad was mainly celebrated in the house, preparations were made in the house. The full house or a particular room was cleaned and white-washed. Provisions and fuel were stocked at least to last the days of Muktdad and new Year. This was done so that one did not need to go shopping during these days. People, as far as possible do not go out of the house, as souls and Fravashis come home, and it is not proper to leave them and go. Sometimes night long vigil was also kept by people. People of the house, especially women who were actively involved with preparations, took a Nahan.

All family members used to contribute their share towards buying house-hold items. This sharing gave rise to the term **Behru**, a Persian word, which means "share" Today, what we understand by the term Behru is the consecrated vase or karasya in which water and flowers are kept during the days of Muktdad. The Behru is symbolic of the unity of the family and does not necessarily represent the departed person.

Muktdad in the house

It is advisable to observe the Muktdad in the house. If not the prayers, at least some arrangement can be done to welcome the Fravashis home. The main requirements for observing Muktdad in the house are fresh water, flowers, a metallic vase or a Karasyo, a metallic or stone table, fire, divo and chanting of prayers. Flowers can be arranged in a vase filled with water and kept in the prayer room or a secluded corner of the house. Water and flowers in the vase have to be changed daily. Flowers and water are the visible emblems and symbolic reminders of the invisible souls and Fravashis.

Water and flowers are representatives of Khordad and Amardad Ameshaspand. They are the carriers of reward for the soul of the deceased . They also uphold life and so do Fravashis. Moreover, all the three are also carriers of divine blessings. Hence water, plant and Fravashis are remembered together at several places (Yasna 26, Farvardin Yasht 23 etc.)

Duration - 10 or 18 days

Today generally we celebrate 10 days of Muktd, starting from Roj Ashtad of Mah Spandarmad and ending at Vahishtoisht Gatha. Zoroastrian texts have references to 10 Farvardegan days. (*dasa pairi khshafnao* in Farvardin Yasht XIII, Phl Vd.VIII.22, Sdr Bnd, 52.1-3, Persian Revayats, Dhabhar).

Since a long time in India, Muktd was celebrated for 18 days. It started on Roj Ashishwangh of Mah Spandarmad and ended on the dawn of roj Amardad mah Fravarden. The earliest evidence of 18 days Muktd is through references in a book which relate such celebrations since the 15th century

The reason Muktd were lengthened to 18 days was that the 7 days after Vahishtoisht Gatha are important since they belong to 7 Amshaspands: Hormazd Roj is Navroz, Ardibahešt roj is Rapithwin consecration, Khordad roj is Khordad sal. Hence these six days were clubbed together to form 18 Muktd days. It should be noted that though the Muktd are said to be of eighteen days, on Ashishwangh roj and Amardad roj hardly any prayers are done.

In the early seventies, especially due to the initiative taken by Dasturji Khurshed Dabu and others, Muktd were once again gradually reverted back to 10 days.

Hamaspathmaedhem Gahambar: The later five days of the 10 day Muktd are also the days of the sixth and the last Gahambar, Hamaspathmaedhem. According to Zoroastrian religion, each of the 6 creations was created during one of the Gahambars. Mankind was created on the last Gahambar.

Purpose of Muktd

In most religious traditions, the departed ones are specially invoked once a year. The Hindus refer these days as **Shradh** and the Christians as **Lent** (before Good Friday). According to Zoroastrian tradition the Fravashis descend at the end of the year.

During the Muktd, one has to keep away from routine work, devote time to the remembrance of Fravashis and do works of charity. Fravashis come whenever they are invited. However, during the days of Muktd all the Fravashis descend. When they come to the house they have to be remembered and worshipped. If they are happy, they give blessings of prosperity and happiness. They should not go back dissatisfied. Great rewards can be obtained by the observation of Muktd.

Muktd is a time of REPAYING the debt of gratitude to our ancestors - those whom we know and the countless others whom we don't know, but who have made a difference to our lives.

These days also help us to renew the MEMORY of our dear departed ones. They also help us realise our RESPONSIBILITY for the future generations. Just as we reap the rewards of the actions done by our past ancestors, we should do something for the future generations.

Special prayers for Muktd, especially for laity:

1. For the first five days, Framraot Hā (commentary of Ashem Vohu) or 1200 Ashem Vohu in the khshnuman of Ardafravash has to be recited.

2. For the five days of Gathas, each Gatha on the respective day or 1200 Yatha in the Khshnuman of Gatha has to be recited.
3. Muktaḍ no namaskar.
4. Lākhi nu bhantar 570 Yatha + 210 Ashem + 120 Yenghe (total 900) in the khsnuman of Sarosh – is to be recited daily for 10 days.

Customs for Muktaḍ

- 1) Not to cut hair and nails, so as not to create *nasō* and impurity.
- 2) Not to stitch clothes or other such avoidable chores, so that one could devote time to prayers and remembrance of Fravashis. Men should not engage in activities except doing their duty and performing meritorious deeds, so that the Fravashis may return with delight and pronounce benedictions.
- 3) To keep fire in the house and offer fragrance to it, praise Fravashis, recite the Fravarden Yasht, perform Afringan and recite Avesta prayers so that the Fravashis experience comfort, joy and delight and confer blessings.

Some customs arose out of ignorance and were later discontinued. For instance, a Jama (long white robe) was hung on sugarcane sticks to remind of the presence of the souls of departed persons. There was also a custom of cleaning the corners of the house with a broom immediately after Muktaḍ to make sure that all the souls and Fravashis depart, lest some may stay back and take back the soul of a living person as company.

Presently there is a practice of going from Agyari to Agyari to pay homage to Muktaḍ. This practice is not in agreement with the spirit of Muktaḍ, wherein we need to stay at home, pray and invite the Fravashis in our houses. Moreover, in the past Muktaḍs were mostly celebrated at home and not in Agyaris.

Important days during Muktaḍ

1. Roj Marespand – Din Beh Mino Marespand: On this day the Zarathushtra was accepted as a prophet by King Vishtasp.
2. Hamaspathmaedhem Gahambar days: To consecrate Gahambar preferably on Ahunavad Gatha or any of the five Gathas.
4. Vahishtoisht Gatha is known as Pateti – day of Repentance. On this day, preferably in the Ushahin Gah, Patet has to be recited to seek forgiveness for sins committed knowingly or unknowingly during the year. The night of Vahishtoisht Gatha is also referred to as *Valāvo*, that is, send off (for the Fravashis).

Muktaḍ are the days of heightened communication between the material and spiritual worlds– our need of health, happiness, peace and prosperity is fulfilled through the blessings of the souls and the Fravashis, and their need for our remembrance is fulfilled by our sincere prayers and invocations.